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Profiling Unemployment Insurance Beneficiaries

During the past two years, state employment agencies have begun an innovative approach to providing reemployment services to the unemployed. In response to legislation enacted by Congress, states have implemented Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) systems. Through these systems, states are taking preemptive action to help unemployment insurance (UI) beneficiaries shorten their time out of work. A state WPRS identifies those UI recipients who are most likely to exhaust benefit entitlements and refers them to required reemployment services. The goal of the WPRS initiative is to focus UI beneficiaries on finding jobs quickly by tailoring reemployment services to meet their specific needs. This new program marks a significant change in the way state employment security agencies allocate resources and deliver services. As a result, a new reemployment system is emerging with increased emphasis on cost effectiveness and better coordination of unemployment compensation, employment service, and public retraining activities.

The Upjohn Institute helped to implement the WPRS in Michigan by providing technical assistance in developing the profiling methodology. In addition, the Institute is currently evaluating the effectiveness of the Michigan WPRS system. After providing a brief general background, this article describes Michigan's profiling system and outlines the Institute's plan for evaluating the system.

Background

Congress enacted profiling legislation to help UI beneficiaries find suitable work and wages more quickly. Laid-off workers who become eligible for UI can draw up to 26 weeks of benefits in most states. During their period of benefit eligibility, workers are expected to search actively for work, but a large percentage are not successful in finding a job before their benefits run out. For example, during the first quarter of 1996, 34 percent of

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From the Executive Director

Institute Announces Winners of the 1996 Dissertation Award

Last year, as part of its 50th anniversary, the Upjohn Institute established an annual award for the best Ph.D. dissertation addressing employment-related issues. This year's selection process was particularly difficult. After all the initial summaries were evaluated, the finalists chosen, and their dissertations read, two dissertations were tied for first place. I am pleased to announce that the co-winners of the 1996 Dissertation Award are **Carolyn Heinrich** and **Jeffrey Smith**, both of the University of Chicago. Honorable mentions were awarded to **John Pepper** of the University of Wisconsin and **Mark Turner** of the University of Maryland.

The two first-place dissertations, while unique in their research questions and methodology, address a common issue: understanding the system of delivering job training services and the impact of these services on their clients. Taken together, this research provides one of the most in-depth examinations of the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) to date and offers valuable insights and policy recommendations for improving the system.

Carolyn Heinrich's dissertation studies the administration and delivery of services by a local JTPA facility. This research evolved from her role as an advisor to a local JTPA service delivery area (SDA) that was implementing a demonstration project to increase the participation of the economically disadvantaged. Ms. Heinrich assisted in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program. In the process, she observed first-hand the daily operations of an SDA, including the process by which service providers and training professionals select clients and determine their assignments to training programs. This close relationship with a local SDA allowed her to access information and gain insights into the operations of the organization that would not have been possible from a more distant vantage point or with secondary data.

Her case study addressed two basic questions. First, how are participants selected into the program and assigned to services? Second, how effective was the demonstration program in attracting and serving severely economically disadvantaged job-training eligibles? The first question confronts the long-standing debate on whether JTPA providers select or "cream" the more highly qualified clients who are eligible for the program. Ms. Heinrich's results suggest that current performance standards encourage "creaming." Creaming is particularly prevalent when budget reductions force providers to cut back on lengthy and expensive training programs and thus incline them to recruit more qualified clients who would do as well finding jobs without the more intensive assistance. With respect to the success of the demonstration project, Ms. Heinrich found that targeting program funds to a spatially concentrated area increased awareness of and participation in the program, increased involvement by community organizations, and raised earnings gains relative to other JTPA programs. She concludes from these findings that performance standards may be effective management tools, but in the case of JTPA programs, the performance standards should be based on changes in earnings before and after participation in the program and not on the current system of gross, placement-oriented outcomes.

Jeffrey Smith also focuses on the JTPA system, but the questions he considers extend to the evaluation of social programs in general. In the first two of three essays, he examines the extent to which program participation affects the performance of nonexperimental estimators of program outcomes. Researchers, starting with Ashenfelter, have observed that mean earnings of participants in employment and training programs often decline prior to receiving reemployment services. Using experimental data from the National JTPA Study, Mr. Smith shows that the earnings dip is transitory, in that the earnings of those who did not participate in the program returned to their pre-dip level shortly after being randomly assigned to the study's control group. Consequently, he concludes that estimators of program outcomes based on the difference between pre-program and post-program experiences are biased upward, which may call into question the estimates of large positive impacts obtained in early evaluations of federal employment and training programs. To understand why the characteristics of program participants differ from nonparticipants, Mr. Smith models the participation process in JTPA. He finds that the recently unemployed are more likely to be aware of the JTPA program and seek out its services than those who have been out of the labor force for a time. He concludes, therefore, that the allegation that JTPA case workers "cream" the eligible individuals may simply be the fact that more job-ready applicants are aware of the program and seek to enroll in it.

John Pepper tackles a vexing problem that has been at the center of much of the debate regarding welfare reform—does welfare dependency breed further dependency across generations? Despite

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Profiling Unemployment Insurance Beneficiaries
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workers who received unemployment compensation did not become reemployed before exhausting their benefits. This percentage is as high as it was during the 1990-91 recession and only a few percentage points below the 40 percent reached during the 1980-82 recessions.

A series of field experiments has shown that providing more intensive job search assistance reduces the duration of insured unemployment and UI expenditures (Bloom 1990; Corson et al. 1989; Johnson and Klepinger 1994). In these experiments, the duration of UI benefits was reduced at least half a week and sometimes more than two weeks. In all cases, the programs paid for themselves, with government benefit-to-cost ratios often exceeding two. The response to reemployment assistance depended upon how soon the intervention took place, the amount of contact with staff, and the extent of monitoring job search efforts. A recent assessment of employment assistance concludes that "job search assistance should be the core service on the menu of adjustment assistance services offered displaced workers" (Leigh 1990, p. 108).

Encouraged by the prospect of reducing unemployment and saving UI tax dollars, Congress mandated states to implement WPRS systems. Michigan began profiling unemployment compensation recipients in November 1994. The program is a joint project of the Michigan Employment Security Commission (MESC), the Michigan Jobs Commission, and local Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) service delivery agencies. During the first three months of operation, more than 120,000 UI recipients were profiled, and approximately 10,000 were referred to reemployment services in Michigan.

UI Profiling in Michigan

Profiling entails a two-stage process. First, unemployment insurance recipients who are expecting recall or who are members of a union hall are excluded from the process because they are not expected to undertake an active independent job search. Second, the remaining unemployment insurance recipients are ranked by their likelihood of exhausting regular unemployment insurance benefits. Beneficiaries are then referred to reemployment services in order of their ranking until the capacity of local agencies to serve them is exhausted.

To profile workers, MESC adopted a statistical methodology that assigns a probability of exhaustion to each UI recipient who is eligible for profiling. The probability is derived from estimating the effects of personal characteristics and economic factors on the likelihood that a UI recipient will exhaust benefits. In essence, the probability assigned to each eligible UI recipient is a weighted average of the effect of each characteristic on the chance of that individual exhausting his or her UI benefits.

The profiling model was estimated on a recent sample of Michigan UI beneficiaries. It indicates that UI recipients are more likely to exhaust regular benefits if they have more education, more job experience, work at less-complex tasks, work in clerical and sales occupations, and work in retail and wholesale trade, and financial, insurance, and real estate industries. Also, the likelihood of exhausting benefits varies substantially across local labor markets. These results from Michigan are similar to what other researchers have found using a national sample (Corson and Dynarski 1990).

Once a week, each local MESC office receives a list of profiled and ranked UI recipients who are beneficiaries through that office. The list includes the name, social security number, and estimated probability of exhausting UI benefits for each profiled beneficiary. Those estimated to be most likely to exhaust are placed at the head of the queue for reemployment services.

The number of UI recipients actually referred to reemployment services at any specific local office depends upon the amount of resources received by that office to provide WPRS. Since funding to local offices is largely based on labor market conditions, local offices with the greatest need should be able to serve a larger proportion of their UI claimants. UI recipients from local offices with tight labor markets or with industries experiencing few layoffs will have statewide rankings much lower than those from local offices with high unemployment rates. Offices located in these areas will serve a smaller proportion of beneficiaries through the WPRS.

Reemployment Services in Michigan

After the Michigan Employment Securities Commission identifies and ranks profiled UI beneficiaries, those most likely to exhaust benefits are referred to reemployment services. Participation is mandatory for those

Table 1. Michigan WPRS Activity (January 1995 through March 1995)

Profiled claimants referred to and completed services	
Total profiled	120,871
Number referred to services	10,527
Number completing services	3,090
Orientation	2,926
Assessment	1,139
Counseling	972
Job placement services; referrals to employers	231
Job search workshops and job clubs	1,963
Education and training	1,026

SOURCE: Michigan Employment Security Commission, ETA 9048.

referred, and benefits are withheld until the individual participates in the program. Participants in the Michigan WPRS program have access to a wide range of services to aid them in gaining reemployment (table 1). Services vary by office but frequently include orientation to the reemployment services, training in job search and interviewing skills, work skills assessment, resume writing, personal appearance tips, teamwork skills, conflict resolution methods, and an overview of resources available at Employment Service (ES) locations. In most localities, service providers work with participants to develop individualized plans that include services that best meet the worker's needs.

Design of the Michigan Evaluation

The primary purpose of the WPRS is to speed the reemployment of those most likely to exhaust benefits and thereby to reduce the length of time workers draw unemployment insurance benefits. The Institute's evaluation of Michigan's profiling effort will assess how local offices implement profiling, the types and extent of services offered by local offices, and the effectiveness of these reemployment services in reducing the duration of insured unemployment and the benefits paid to claimants. The evaluation is based on information gathered through surveys mailed to ES and SDA offices, on-site interviews, and administrative records.

The success of UI profiling as an effective allocation system could have far-reaching implications for other government programs.

The referral of UI recipients to reemployment services will be evaluated on the basis of (1) the promptness with which recipients are referred to reemployment services after being ranked, (2) the propensity of referred clients to participate in the reemployment service, and (3) the types of services used by the claimants. The effectiveness of the reemployment services will be measured by (1) the duration of UI benefit receipt, (2) the amount of UI benefits paid in the benefit year, and (3) the UI benefit exhaustion rate. Program impacts will be estimated by comparing these outcomes for a randomly selected WPRS participant group with a comparison group randomly selected from beneficiaries with similar characteristics who were not referred to WPRS.

Conclusion

Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services present a new model for government agencies to allocate resources and coordinate services. Instead of providing services to clients on a first-come first-served basis or after applying a static eligibility requirement, the profiling system targets those individuals who are most likely to be unemployed long term. In essence, the profiling system is a triage, attempting to direct services to those who need and will benefit from them the most.

The success of UI profiling as an effective allocation system could have far-reaching implications for other government programs. In the current political climate in which entitlements for government services are being scaled back, profiling may be seized as an efficient mechanism for allocating resources. The new welfare system is a likely candidate for such a model. With dwindling entitlements and fewer funds, the success of welfare reform may rest on identifying those welfare recipients who are most likely to benefit from reemployment services. Bane and Ellwood (1983) offered a similar suggestion over a decade ago, but at that time a profiling-type method was untested and appeared to be too radical a departure from accepted procedures. If profiling is effective in Michigan and other states, this innovation in the delivery of reemployment services could be extended to improve the effectiveness of other social programs.

Randall W. Eberts is Executive Director and Christopher J. O'Leary is Senior Economist at the Upjohn Institute.

Suggested Readings

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George A. Erickcek

Developing Community Economic Outcome Measures

A fundamental role for community leaders is the articulation of a vision for their community. This vision should address the community's shortfalls, build upon its strengths, and provide guidance for the community's future allocation of resources. Given the current trend of transferring greater responsibility from the federal government to the local level, this visioning function of community leaders will grow in importance.

Citizens are increasingly demanding that government and community organizations show accountability in achieving results. Hence, leaders in some communities are exploring ways to monitor their success in reaching the goals outlined in their vision statement. One way to do so is to develop specific outcome measures for these goals.

Community outcome measures may stimulate a broad-based discussion in a community about what truly are the community's highest priorities. Community outcome measures may also help focus the attention of government agencies and community organizations on how to achieve the community's most important goals. Finally, community outcome measures may be used to identify areas in which the community is not performing well, and in which reforms or additional efforts are needed.

Outcome measures by themselves, however, should not be used in some simplistic fashion to evaluate the overall performance of a specific government agency or community organization. Outcome measures tell us how the community is doing in achieving important goals, such as changes in its unemployment rate, high school graduation rate, or the number of teenage pregnancies, but by themselves outcome measures do not identify the causes of these changes. For example, the local unemployment rate could be pushed downward because the community is fortunate in having many of its firms in fast growing industries; or it may be because several of its firms developed highly successful market strategies; or it may be because of its economic development effort. For a proper evaluation of the effectiveness of the area's economic development efforts, it is necessary to isolate the impacts of those efforts from the other possible factors. This is a task community outcome measures by themselves cannot achieve. To do so requires additional research and analysis.

Three major questions face community leaders when they consider establishing community outcome measures.

1. What community attributes or trends will be monitored?
2. How should the community's performance be measured?
3. What data should be used?

Community outcome measures should be comprised only of those local indicators that monitor the area's progress toward community-defined goals or vision. Care should be taken not to include data or indicators only because they are readily available. In addition, measures should not be simple tallies of the current activities of government or community agencies, such as the number of meetings convened, the number of business retention calls made, or the amount of information distributed. Such tallies do not reflect whether these activities actually help affect important community outcomes. Moreover, focusing on such tallies tends to encourage the community to continue current strategies rather than consider different strategies.

One illustration of how a community might develop outcome measures is the "community economic benchmarking system" recently developed for Benton Harbor (Michigan) by the Upjohn Institute. Economic development interests in the greater Benton Harbor area requested the Institute to construct outcome measures for the area's economy. To guide the development of the monitoring system, Institute staff, as a first step, facilitated several focus group sessions comprised of area business and economic development leaders to identify the specific objectives of the outcome measures system. Area business leaders concluded that the purpose of the outcome measures was to monitor the "key economic and social attributes that businesses examine when they make their location decisions." Moreover, they agreed that the key attributes to be monitored were the availability of a qualified workforce, infrastructure capacity to support growth, a growing and diversified economy and the area's quality of life. A similar process could be used by communities to identify outcome measures in areas other than economic development, although obviously the composition of the focus groups would be different.

For a proper evaluation of the effectiveness of the area's economic development efforts, it is necessary to isolate the impacts of those efforts from the other possible factors.

After the community identifies the characteristics to be monitored, its leaders must choose how to measure their area's performance. One strategy is to establish specific targets, such as to reduce the area's high school dropout rate below 5 percent by the year 2010. Several potential problems plague this approach. First, it can lead to frustrations if the goals are set too high or when factors outside the control of the community's efforts have too much influence. A weak national economy can thwart the performance of an effective economic effort, for example. On the other hand, community goals that are set too low, can lead to complacency.

A second option is to measure local outcomes relative to a comparable group of similar areas. A comparison analysis has the advantage of controlling for national and certain structural factors, as they should be felt by all of the communities in the comparison group. Of course, the difficulty facing leaders taking this approach is developing a good selection criterion to use in picking the comparison communities. In the Benton Harbor area study, we used the following set of criteria to identify 15 comparable areas. Relative to Benton Harbor, the comparison areas must:

Goals without measures become little more than dreams, and data collection without direction offers little insight.

1. be of similar size
2. have a comparable industrial base as measured by the percentage of its workforce in manufacturing
3. be as economically competitive, as measured by the performance of its firms relative to national industry averages
4. have no major four-year universities
5. have a similar racial composition

These particular criteria for comparison communities were chosen because they were thought to be major factors affecting a community's economic development. If a community was developing outcome measures in areas other than economic development—such as public health, children's well-being, or poverty—then comparison communities should be chosen based on community characteristics that were thought to be important determinants of community outcomes in these areas.

The final and perhaps most arduous task in developing community outcome measures is, of course, data collection. Local data are highly limited and sometimes of questionable quality. If a comparison analysis is used, data availability is even more restricted because comparable data must be found for the comparison areas as well. Moreover, if the outcome measures are to be updated annually and reflect current conditions, researchers are limited to only those data published annually and having a minimum time-lag. For some data series, such as income and crime statistics, a two-year lag is common. More troubling, these restrictions eliminate using the wealth of data available in the decennial censuses. The annual updating requirements also can limit primary data collection because of the expense involved in conducting annual surveys.

Finally, a community outcome measures report is a living document, meaning that it must be regularly fed and nurtured. Not only are annual updates required, the community must review the effectiveness and correctness of the data indicators used. The Upjohn Institute's outcome measures system for the Benton Harbor area was completed in June 1996, and already area community leaders have suggested several additions and revisions to the data series.

Former Mayor Koch of New York City was fond of asking, "How am I doing?" It is an important question that requires serious thought in answering. Community goals must be set, outcome measures established, and data collected. Each step is close to worthless without the others. Goals without measures become little more than dreams, and data collection without direction offers little insight. But a good outcome measurement system, if used systematically over time, can significantly help a community to focus on and achieve its key goals.

George Erickcek is Senior Regional Analyst at the Upjohn Institute

From the Executive Director

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the rhetoric and research, definitive answers have not been found for the fundamental reason that it is not possible to observe how children who actually grew up under welfare would have behaved if they had grown up in families not dependent upon welfare. Mr. Pepper explores different scenarios for welfare dependency, suggested by research and the policy debate, to see how they affect the likelihood and length of time that daughters of welfare mothers will themselves be dependent on welfare programs. His approach is informative in that it narrows the range of assumptions that are consistent with the transmission of welfare dependency.

Mark Turner also addresses a controversial and politically charged topic regarding the effects of raising the minimum wage on low-wage workers. His research focuses on educational outcomes, by examining the impact of employment on academic achievement among high school students and investigating the effect of the minimum wage on school enrollment. Mr. Turner's treatment of the latter relationship has direct bearing on the current policy debate. He demonstrates that recent research showing that a minimum wage hike would increase the high school dropout rate rests on a faulty measure of school enrollment. Substituting a more accurate enrollment measure, Mr. Turner finds no impact of the minimum wage on dropout rates. He goes on to show that students who work more than 30 hours per week have lower test scores, lower grade point averages, are more likely to drop out of school, and less likely to enter college.

Members of the selection committee extend their congratulations to this year's dissertation award recipients, and thank all participants for submitting their work.

Randall W. Eberts

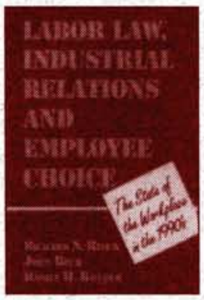
New Books from the Upjohn Institute

Labor Law, Industrial Relations and Employee Choice

The State of the Workplace in the 1990s

Richard N. Block, John Beck,
Daniel H. Kruger
Michigan State University

The review U.S. labor law dating back to the Wagner Act, citing NLRB and court decisions along with societal factors to show how industrial relations evolved into today's system for governing worker–management relations.



Next they use testimony delivered during the Dunlop Commission hearings, to present specific examples of contemporary industrial relations in union and nonunion firms. The first examples show firms that have chosen to respect the right of employees to choose or not choose union representation. Often, these examples reveal highly innovative and cooperative relationships between workers and management. Examples that follow show how employers overlooked the "intent of the law" by taking advantage of potential delays inherent in the appeals process of NLRB decisions and sometimes resorting to threats, coercion and firings.

The authors argue that the state of labor law today points to the need for change. It is ironic, they conclude, that labor laws now seem to preserve the rights of employers, rather than the right of employees to choose or not to choose unions.

113 pp. $24 cloth ISBN 0–88099–164–X
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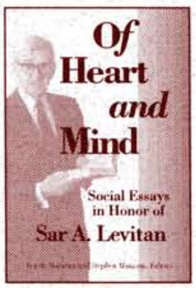
Of Heart and Mind

Social Essays in Honor of Sar A. Levitan

Garth Mangum, *University of Utah*
Stephen Mangum, *Ohio State University*
Editors

A devoted public servant and educator, Sar Levitan remained steadfast in his quest to preserve and improve social policy on behalf of the nation's disadvantaged. Over the decades, he invariably impressed—and sometimes frustrated—members of both Democratic and Republican administrations with his objectivity and forthrightness. Yet, as five former U.S. Secretaries of Labor and Commerce put it in the book's foreword, "The world was better for Sar Levitan having been in it and suffers to the same degree from his absence."



The essays in this volume pay tribute to Levitan and the enduring mark he left on the world of public policy.

Contributors include: Stephen Mangum, Garth Mangum, Andrew Sum, Clifford Johnson, W. Neal Fogg, Marta Tienda, Avner Ahituv, Eli Ginzberg, David Stephens, Miriam Johnson, Audrey Freedman, Stephen Baldwin, Robert Goldfarb, William Grinker, Vernon Briggs Jr., Burt Barnow, Christopher King, Susan Curnan, Alan Melchior, Alan Zuckerman, Irene Lurie, Colette Moser, James Heckman, Markley Roberts, and Trevor Bain. Also included is Sar Levitan's complete bibliography.

413 pp. $30 cloth ISBN 0–88099–172–0
$20 paper ISBN 0–88099–171–2 / 1996

Program Applicants as a Comparison Group in Evaluating Training Programs

Theory and a Test

Stephen H. Bell, Larry L. Orr,
John D. Blomquist, *Abt Associates*
Glen G. Cain
University of Wisconsin–Madison

This study begins with an assessment of nonexperimental employment and training program evaluation techniques based on nonrandom comparison groups. Such techniques generally rely on the use of comparison groups from nonprogram "external" sources. Recognizing the drawbacks inherent in this approach, the authors reintroduce the use of "internal" comparison groups. Internal groups include withdrawals, screen–outs and no–shows from the programs being evaluated. Their use helps deal with a major drawback of external sources, the selection bias problem.

The authors update this technology, first used in the 1960s, and test it against the random experimental findings derived from a controlled job training experiment, the AFDC Homemaker–Home Health Aide Demonstrations. Encouraging results are presented along with useful suggestions for designers and implementors of all types of program evaluations.

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